

Reach Out and Touch: Outreach to a Local Nursing Home

*Luther W. Machen Elementary School
Hampton, Virginia*

Machen Elementary School is part of a military community. Many students do not spend much time with their grandparents because they are located at a distance. But thanks to a parent on the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), the students now have a meaningful connections with the elderly in their community.

At the beginning of the school year, Machen Elementary took the parent's suggestion and "adopted" the Coliseum Park Nursing Home. Each month one grade level (K-5) sponsored an activity at the home or involved the residents in other ways. For example:

- * One month, the seniors read to students during Children's Book Week, and the student Nutrition Club helped serve lunch to the visitors.
- * Around Christmas, the second-grade teachers, students and families decorated holiday wreaths for the residents' doors and entertained residents by singing carols.
- * Kindergarten staff, students and their family members participated in a "throws and bows" workshop in January. They made cards and gift-wrapped blanket throws and socks donated by local businesses for the nursing home residents.
- * In February, students put a "giving tree" at the entrance of the school with the names of residents and items they needed printed on a paper heart. All families and staff had the opportunity to remove a paper heart and buy the gift that was listed. Parent volunteers and staff representatives delivered the gifts to the residents.
- * The last outreach activity of the year involved first-grade students making sun visors for the residents, promoting the importance of sun safety.

About 100 students and parents, 35 teachers and administrators, and 100 community members participated in the monthly activities.

Reach Out and Touch made students more aware of the needs of others and acquainted them with service-oriented organizations in their community. It was hoped that the students would benefit from positive community relationships that encouraged a sense of belonging and purpose. The practice, included in the Action Plan for Partnerships under Collaborating with the Community, aimed to instill and reinforce compassion, friendship, respect and tolerance. In addition, it is designed to foster social responsibility among families.

Parents in the school's Parent Partner program planned and organized many of the activities. They worked with classroom teachers to communicate initiatives for families and the community. All activities were supported by the Title I parent involvement fund. Teachers and parents worked together in and out of school to organize and execute all activities.

Feedback from the residents and the coordinator of the nursing home was extremely positive. Those at Machen liked the project, too. "I think community service is necessary especially for the population we serve," said one fifth-grade teacher. "As classroom teachers we should model for our students how we give back to the community."

A fourth-grade student was equally enthusiastic: "It is a good thing because we get to do generous things for other people. It teaches kids to do things for others and not to just think about themselves."

To improve the activity even more, the school invited the coordinator at the nursing home to become a member of the ATP for the 07-08 school year. The coordinator accepted – making an already-strong partnership a little more secure.

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